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ABSTRACT

Florida's community college system is uniquely positioned to work toward the fulfillment of the goal of equitable representation of black students in the state's system of higher education. At present, efforts are falling far short of that goal. While blacks represented 18.7% of the 15-24 year olds in the state in 1988, they earned only 4.8% of the associate degrees awarded by community colleges and 4% of the baccalaureate degrees awarded by the State University System that year. In order to promote college attendance, graduation, and transfer, the following steps should be taken: (1) academically promising students should be identified in middle school and guided toward the college preparatory track; (2) children from district middle and high schools should be brought to the college campus for cultural and sporting events, career and college fairs, and other activities; (3) financial aid resources should be developed to ensure that talented students from impoverished families are aware of funding options, can complete the application, and receive needed financial support; (4) black community leaders should be asked to assist in mentoring students and recruiting minorities for faculty and administration positions; (5) entering freshmen should be given an intensive orientation to support services; (6) a black student union or black advisory committee should be formed; and (7) students who show academic potential should be directed toward the college transfer tracks. (WJT)

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PLANNING FOR ACCESS:
THE ROLE OF THE FLORIDA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM IN BLACK STUDENT RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND GRADUATION

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Susan Summers
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Access to higher education for all citizens of the State of Florida is an important value shared by most of the voters of the state. The extensive Florida community college system is uniquely positioned to be the conduit to a university education for all citizens who have a basic academic aptitude and the motivation to learn (Blake, Pogue, Richardson, Richardson & Bender).

Attempts to involve members of minority races, particularly blacks, in the postsecondary education system have been disappointing (Postsecondary Education Planning Commission, National Center for Postsecondary Governance and Finance, Hutchins). While the proportions of the ethnic minorities are increasing because of the relative rise in birth rates for minority group women, the percentage of blacks and hispanics who complete a college education remains low

(Jaschik 1987a, PEPC). The Nation appears in danger of developing an economic and educational underclass whose dependence for food, shelter, medical care, and child support grows, and whose contribution to the tax base declines (Wilson & Justiz). Particularly frightening is that, in examining the participation of blacks and Hispanics who do attend college, the women are far better represented than the men; black and Hispanic men are a growing segment of the prison population (Wygal, Pogue & Kronick, PEPC, Kappner 1989a).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the reasons that blacks continue to be underrepresented in Florida's universities and colleges, and to suggest what can be done at the community college level to increase the level of participation of black citizens in higher education. The black minority is the focus of this paper because it is the predominant minority group in North Florida. However, many of the conclusions derived may be applicable to other minority groups where higher education is not a tradition and the economic level is lower than for the majority.

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The Representation of Blacks in Florida's Higher Education System

The proportion of blacks in the 15-24 year old cohort in Florida was 18.7 percent in 1988, up from 17.7 percent in 1980 (PEPC). The number of Floridians in this age group actually increased by 35.7 percent in the 1980's, and is projected to swell by another 9.7 percent in the 1990's. The relative proportion of blacks in this cohort is projected to rise. The percentage of blacks in the high school graduating classes declined every year from 1985-88, ending at 17.5 percent in 1988. However, the percentage of black students among high school graduates in Florida is reflective of their proportion in the age cohort.

For the same year, only 4.8 percent of community college Associate of Arts graduates were black, and 4 percent of those earning baccalaureate degrees from the State University System (SUS) were black. Evidently this State is equitably graduating black students from

high school but is less successful at the postsecondary level.

The State of Florida higher education system is structured so that the community college network provides the first two years toward the baccalaureate degree, using a two-plus-two approach (PEPC). Articulation between the community colleges and the SUS is good, with access to a baccalaureate program at one of the universities guaranteed to every community college student who completes the A.A. and earns a passing score on the CLAST . Approximately two-thirds of high school graduates who enter higher education in Florida enroll in a community college.

Like other Adams states, Florida was viewed by the Supreme Court in 1970 as operating a system of higher education that was essentially segregated and further, that facilities for black students were inferior to those for white students. Not until 1985 did the courts rule that Florida had an acceptable desegregation plan in place (Pruitt).

In most *Adams* states, the result was an increase in black student enrollment at the traditionally white universities with a comparable decline in black student enrollment at traditionally black colleges, for a net result of little change (Jaschik 1987b, Pruitt). The Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University in Tallahassee (FAMU) is the only traditionally black institution in the State of Florida postsecondary system. The FAMU administration has been successful in recruiting black students, but not white students (PEPC). In 1988, 97.8 percent of freshmen at FAMU were black, as compared to 7.0 percent in the entire SUS. Thus, at least at the undergraduate level, FAMU is more racially segregated than the other eight State of Florida universities.

Recruitment

More black students at the lower division level are enrolled in community colleges than in four-year colleges. This is a relationship that should be encouraged (Richardson). Community colleges are

equipped to serve students that may be underprepared academically and culturally, but who have potential for college-level work (Blake).

Among families where there is no precedent of participation in higher education, the first objective is to create an orientation toward continuing with education beyond high school graduation (Applegate, Richardson). There are a number of reasons for pursuing a college degree that transcend considerations of career preparation. From one perspective, the intended result is empowerment through personal achievement (Eaton, Kappner 1989b). In America today, higher education may be viewed as the key to upward mobility and the true social integration of the minority group into the dominant culture (Nettles, Pogue). Additionally, a democratic society requires an educated citizenry (Pogue).

Student preparation for college is not limited to academic skills (Arnold, Richardson). Preparation must also include developing a goal orientation to attend college. Thus, recruitment must begin well before the

senior year of high school. High school juniors should be brought to the college campus as a form of early outreach (Hutchins, White). They can attend cultural and sporting events, career and college transfer fairs, and other student activities such as drug abuse prevention seminars and handicapped awareness days.

The Student Service programs of the College should be extended to the middle and secondary schools as both a recruitment tool and a tangible demonstration of College cooperation with the area school districts. Students in middle school can be exposed to career exploration, personal interest testing, and workshops on educational and career opportunities (Ortega & Hughes). This can be done by college staff in cooperation with the school district counselors, or by the college in the form of a field trip for students. Many students do not take college-preparation classes because they are not advised to take them (Collison). High school guidance counselors are burdened with other tasks. If the student does not come from a family environment where other family members are college

educated, an orientation to college as a vehicle for opportunity must be developed (Applegate, Richardson, Wygal et al.).

Financial Aid

The college's financial aid office should be aggressive in outreach to high school seniors. Insufficient is the typical approach, that of holding annual evening workshops to which seniors and their parents are invited. In a household where the parents are not college educated, and are perhaps illiterate, the likelihood is that no one will attend. The student may believe a college education is financially unobtainable.

Financial aid forms are bewildering to many people. More effective are workshops that are brought into the black community, particularly to events which are well attended by black families, such as Wednesday night church programs. The staff should be available on-site to complete the forms if necessary.

Work/study should be readily available so that the student will not need to work off campus, where the schedule is not as likely to support the demands of school and homework. Especially to the student who is already at risk of not completing the degree or certificate, it is important that work/study, grants and loans be available to lend total financial support.

Standardized Testing

An obstacle to the recruitment of minorities is the requirement for passing scores on standardized tests. These tests are typically weighted toward the cultural majority, in item content and norm (Evangelauf 1990a, Wilson). With the open-door policy in place at all community colleges in Florida, standardized tests are used not to deny admission, but for academic advising and placement. Standardized testing at the community college can be seen as a form of access to higher education, rather than a barrier (Kanter).

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Remediation

Remedial courses at community colleges are the province of more than minority groups. The open door policy means that many of the students are working below college level, in one or more of the three identified subject areas for remediation: reading, composition, and math. These students are given additional support from Student services in order to build personal competency and develop a supportive network in tandem with building academic skills.

In light of the low skill level of today's high school graduate, combined with the necessity for most students to be gainfully employed while attending college, it is no longer realistic to assume that two years will be sufficient to earn an associate degree; four years, for a bachelor's. More realistic, particularly for the underprepared student, is to consider a thirteenth year of grade school (Hutchins) before beginning college work. The student should be prepared for an extended term in college at an early

stage so that the additional time is not perceived as a personal failure (Mangan).

At the community college, remediation can include preparation for improved performance on standardized tests. Of most pressing concern is the College Level Skills Test, mandatory in Florida for any student wanting to obtain an associate degree or enter a university. Such preparation should also benefit the student for future tests needed for admission to graduate or professional school (Wilson).

Role Models

All colleges are struggling to meet Affirmative Action goals for faculty members from the black population (Jaschik 1987a). One of the central reasons that higher education needs black teachers is to serve as role models for black students (White, Wilson). In light of the shortage of qualified black college faculty, other measures should be aggressively taken. Successful black members of the community from outside the field of education should be recruited to serve as

mentors for students. Black students can be paid to tutor other students, a method that combines financial aid with mentoring (Kappner 1989a). Graduate students can be recruited to teach at the community college or undergraduate level (Richardson). Financial aid as well as encouragement should be available to encourage promising black students to enter the teaching profession (Hutchins).

Retention

Retention beyond the first semester is improved by orientating the student before the beginning of the first term (Kappner 1989b); alternatively, by providing intensive orientation early in the first term (Bedford & Durkee). The students should be given a thorough acquaintance with the physical location and purpose of every service and personally introduced to the staff they will encounter when attempting to access those services.

Services should be open during evening and weekend hours, to be accessible to the student who is employed

after school or is only able to attend in non-traditional hours (Medsker, Collins, Cross, Clarke, Richardson, Leach, Fordyce & Williamson; Johnson & Pritchards).

The presence of a Black Student Union, Black Student Affairs Administrator or Black Advisory Committee (Valencia Community College, White) can be a real asset in establishing a supportive environment for the black student minority on a predominantly white campus. While the goal is to have a racially integrated society, it must be recognized that today this nation is far from attaining that goal.

Completion of the Associate Degree and Transfer

Students who show potential for graduate or professional school should be identified early in their college careers, so they can be guided into the academic foundation courses and receive any remedial training required for preparation for the rigorous courses they will need in the future (Wine). Just as the high school student with academic potential needs

to be encouraged to follow a college-preparatory curriculum, so should the promising community college student be guided toward the transfer rather than technical degree.

Aggressive assistance in obtaining financial aid for continued study is just as important for the transfer student as for the potential freshman. The obligation of the community college financial aid officer should extend to linking the transfer student with available resources for continued education.

Arguments in favor of encouraging black students to attend traditionally black colleges are the higher graduation rate and grade point averages for black students at black colleges, as compared to black students at white colleges (Simmons & Jackson). One application of this statistic is to encourage articulation with the black colleges for upper-division work after completion of the A.A. (Nettles).

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Summary

The community college system is uniquely positioned to work toward fulfillment of the goal of equitable representation by black citizens in the state of Florida system of higher education. At the present time, efforts are falling far short of that goal.

In order to have more black students graduate from the State Universities, these steps should be taken:

1. Academically promising students should be identified in the middle school years and guided toward the college preparatory track.

2. Children from district middle and high schools should regularly be brought to the college campus for cultural and sporting events, career and college fairs, and other activities.

3. Financial aid resources should be developed to fully support talented students from impoverished families. The community college Financial Aid office should aggressively carry the message to the black community that these funds are available, and directly

assist students and families to complete application for aid.

4. The leaders of the black community, both on and off campus, should be asked to assist with mentoring students and recruiting minority members for faculty and administration positions.

5. Entering freshmen who may need extra services in order to be successful at the college level should be given an intensive orientation, either in the summer months before they enroll, or early in the first term. It should include tours of all support services and introduction to people in those services who will be able to assist.

6. Black students should feel integrated into the fabric of the campus, possible through the establishment of a Black Student Union or Black Advisory Committee should be formed.

7. Students who show potential for academic work should be directed toward the college transfer track and assisted with transfer to an appropriate university after completion of the associate degree.

These added efforts toward educating members of the black minority will bear fruit for all citizens of this State, through better citizenship, a more highly skilled workforce, and the ability to repay the assistance of today with taxes contributed from a lifetime of employment as a business person or professional.

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